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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: DISSIDENT CUBAN WRITERS LAUNCH PEN CLUB

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) A group of dissident Cuban writers, led by former political prisoner Jorge Oliveira and Victor Manuel Dominguez, founded a PEN Club in Cuba, and held its first activity June 26 at the COM Residence. The event was largely cultural, with a Cuban trio performing Cuban and American music, and the writers reading their own and other Cubans' poems, as well as works by American poets. They and the two dozen other writers and dissidents present also paid homage to the objective of PEN clubs worldwide, which is to guarantee the right of freedom of expression. The German embassy will host the group's second event in mid-July.

¶2. (SBU) Comment: In a less totalitarian world, this kind of event might be held at a church, a university, or other public place. Here, the dissident writers have few options beyond foreign embassies or official residences -- and USINT policy has been to make the COMR an open forum for exactly these kinds of activities. Far more important than the venue is the very fact of the PEN club's launch, demonstrating yet again that important segments of Cuban civil society are vibrant, and not willing to sit back and let the regime dictate what passes for or doesn't pass for Cuban culture.
PARMLY